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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the Transnational Radical Party, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV)

[19 February 1998]

Question of religious freedom in Tibet

1. The question of religious freedom is not only an issue of individual freedom but also one of collective rights. This is particularly true in the case of a people struggling to preserve an ancient religious tradition when confronted with policies of a totalitarian ruler who attempts to eradicate it. In such situations, the denial of religious freedom violates both individual and collective rights because the ultimate aim of the regime is to destroy the very basis of a rich cultural heritage of a people. This reality exists in Tibet today.

2. The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, a subordinate body of the Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1991/10 of 23 August 1991 concerning Tibet expressed its concern "at the continuing reports of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms which threaten the distinct cultural, religious and national identity of the Tibetan people". In recent years, the Special Rapporteur on the question of religious intolerance, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of the Child have all expressed concern on the denial of religious liberties in Tibet.

3. Since the visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur to Tibet in November 1994, the Chinese authorities have carried out new policies to curtail religious freedom in Tibet. Although religious freedom is supposedly guaranteed under China's Constitution, the Chinese authorities now even say that they want to transform Tibet into an atheist region.

4. For example, in its issue of 26 November 1996, according to an article in Xizang Ribao, an official Chinese newspaper in Tibet, "... the influence of religion and traditional concepts are especially serious. Some cadres and people, instead of fostering lofty communist ideals, regard religious belief as their spiritual pillar; they have no faith in the fact that only under the communist party's leadership and by taking the socialist road can a free, happy life become a reality, but regard turning of the wheel (of Tibetan Buddhism) and burning the incense as the 'magic medicine' for freeing oneself from suffering; they do not rely on science and civilization to transform the objective world, but use religion or superstitious ideas to obstruct the exploitation and utilization of resources; they do not use their wisdom and strength to serve the community and benefit the people, but waste their precious time to pursue the illusory next life; they do not use the limited financial resources to develop production, shake off poverty and become well off, but generously donate them to lamaseries; and they do not let their children receive modern education and become useful people of the country but send them to lamaseries to become monks and nuns".

5. The Chinese authorities launched an unprecedented anti-Dalai Lama campaign after holding the "Third National Forum on Work in Tibet" at Beijing in 1994. Vitriolic attacks on the Dalai Lama subsequently appeared in materials used for political education and in January 1995, the campaign was publicly launched in the official media. By this time what was unusual was not the violence of the language used, but the fact that it criticized the Dalai Lama on religious rather than political grounds. For the first time since 1979, Beijing attacked his religious credibility and suitability for

leadership: "The purpose of Buddhism is to deliver all living creatures in a peaceful manner. Now the Dalai and his clique have violated the religious doctrine and even have spread rumours to fool and incite one people against the other; in what way can he be regarded as a spiritual leader? ... As for Dalai, he has always incorporated 'Tibet Independence' into the doctrines which he preaches in his sermons, ... wildly attempting to use godly strength to poison and bewitch the masses ... Such flagrant deceptiveness and demagogy constitute a blasphemy to Buddhism."

6. In a further attempt to alienate the Dalai Lama from his people and followers of Tibetan Buddhism in this world, on 26 January 1996, an order was issued by the Department of Culture of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" to remove all photographs of the Dalai Lama from Norbulingka and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The ban was eventually extended to all public institutions and private homes in Tibet.

7. For instance, on 7 May 1996, a Chinese "work team" (gongzuo dui) arrived at Gaden monastery near Lhasa, tasked with removing all photographs of the Dalai Lama. The monks refused to cooperate, sparking off a riot. When Chinese armed security personnel raided the monastery, one monk, Kelsang Nyendrak, died after being shot and five other monks, including 14-year-old Gelek Jinpa, received bullet wounds; 85 to 90 monks were arrested. On 3 June 1997, according to Xizang Ribao, Chinese official newspaper, 14 of these monks were sentenced in 1996 as "criminals" who incited "monks to shout reactionary slogans, organizing illegal demonstrations, smashing up a police sub-station, beating up State functionaries, stubbornly following Dalai clique, (and) vainly attempting to break up the motherland".

8. In April 1996, China launched the "Strike Hard or Crack Down Severely on Crimes" campaign, targeted at crushing corruption and crime. Within Tibet, Chinese authorities had this campaign to focus on "splittists" - individuals who support Tibetan freedom and the leadership of the Dalai Lama. The main sub-campaign of "Strike Hard" within Tibet is the so-called "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" and following campaigns, such as that of banning photographs of the Dalai Lama, aimed at stifling politically restive monks and nuns.

9. The re-education campaign was conducted by work teams who entered monasteries and nunneries to force monks and nuns to renounce Tibetan Independence; His Holiness the Dalai Lama; Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Panchen Lama. At Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, for example, 180 communist cadres were involved in the re-education sessions which began on 1 August 1996.

10. Human rights groups and other sources report more than 165 arrests and at least two deaths since China launched the campaign in monasteries and nunneries in Tibet. Twenty-four of the arrests were a direct result of monks questioning a work team's form of education. Tenchok Tenphel, a 27-year-old monk, was reportedly arrested at Sakya Monastery on 1 September 1996 in front of a re-education session. He died on 14 September at Sakya District Prison. Although according to the Chinese authorities, he died by "committing suicide", Tibetans allege that he had died as a result of torture in prison.

11. Another grave consequence from the above-mentioned campaign in Tibet is the expulsion of monks who refused to accept this Chinese policy. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in India, 2,827 monks and nuns were expelled in 1996 and 1997. Many of the expelled monks and nuns fled to India and Nepal in recent months. "Those with a bad attitude to the studying and those with poor results or deliberately causing obstacles to the study will be severely criticized and their right to remain among other monks will be struck out", said an official notice handed to each monk at Sera monastery in mid-June 1996.

12. Two different ID-cards are being issued to monks and nuns in following the "re-education campaign". The holder of the red ID-card is considered a permanent, "official" member of the monastery or nunnery who has completed satisfactorily the "patriotic re-education" session and enjoy special privileges. The holder of the blue ID-card is considered to be a temporary monk or nun who has been admitted by the monastery or nunnery without the approval of the Democratic Management Committee and does not enjoy all the privileges. Holders of this card are placed on travel restrictions to within the region of domicile with the holder having to subsequently "prove loyalty to the nation" to obtain the red ID-card.

13. As regards the incommunicado detention of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet, China after more than a year of denials, finally admitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (in May-June 1996), that the boy was in Beijing's custody. However, China continues to fail to declare publicly the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents. The Transnational Radical Party supports the decision of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (E/CN.4/1997/34) that China provide the Working Group with documents supporting its claim that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents had appealed to the Government for protection and at present are "leading normal lives and enjoying perfect health".

14. The April 1997 announcement of the sentencing of Chadrel Rinpoche, the former acting-abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas in Shigatse, to six years of prison term for "leaking State secrets" is a clear proof that he had been under incommunicado detention for more than two years. When reports of his arrest reached the outside world, China told reporters that Chadrel Rinpoche was sick and hospitalized. The whereabouts of Chadrel Rinpoche is still unknown after his arrest on 17 May 1995. According to some reports, he is being detained at a top-secret cell in Chuandong No. 3 Prison in Dazu district, in Sichuan province. Chadrel Rinpoche and his associates were imprisoned primarily because they defended Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the reincarnation of the Tenth Panchen Lama.

15. The situation in Tibet clearly indicates that the Chinese authorities continue to impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion and that the overall situation of human rights there has deteriorated. The Transnational Radical Party urges the Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-fourth session, to pay closer attention to the deteriorating situation of religious freedom in Tibet. We call upon the Commission's members to adopt a resolution to censure China for its human rights failures.